



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD SPENCE HEARING ON NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE PROGRAM

Today, the committee meets to examine the U.S. National Missile Defense, or NMD, program, and to review Administration policy toward missile defenses.

Last week, the Research and Development Subcommittee heard testimony from the Director of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization regarding the technical feasibility of the Administration's preferred NMD architecture. This morning, the committee will hear from the Administration in more detail about its plans to develop for deployment a limited ground-based NMD system capable of defending the United States against accidental, unauthorized, or small-scale ballistic missile attacks from rogue states – or, to use the latest terminology of the day – “states of concern.”

At the outset, I am compelled to reflect upon how we arrived at this point. It is ironic that this Administration, after years of opposing NMD, is now on the verge of deciding whether to move forward with deployment of just such a system. For the past five years, the Congress has sought to move the Clinton Administration toward support for NMD deployment. Congress added funds to the Administration's NMD budget request each year since 1995. However, our efforts were met with Administration resistance at every turn. In fact, in December 1995, the President vetoed the National Defense Authorization Act, declaring that deploying a national missile defense would, “waste tens of billions of dollars,” set U.S. policy “on a collision course with the ABM Treaty,” and jeopardize further Russian strategic arms reductions.

Many in Congress, myself included, criticized the Administration's misuse of a fatally flawed 1995 intelligence estimate to argue that the United States would not face a long-range ballistic missile threat from rogue states for 15 years. This faulty estimate led the Congress, in the fiscal year 1997 National Defense Authorization Act, to mandate creation of the so-called “Rumsfeld Commission,” which was tasked with providing an independent and bipartisan assessment of the ballistic missile threat.

The Rumsfeld Commission's unanimous conclusions were sobering – it found the threat to be “broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly” than the intelligence community had predicted and warned that future ballistic missile threats to the United States could emerge with “little or no warning.” This warning was confirmed shortly after the commission issued its report, when North Korea unexpectedly demonstrated the capability of launching a 3-stage missile of intercontinental range.

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Despite the Rumsfeld Commission's warning, the United States today lacks the ability to defend Americans against even a single ballistic missile launched in our direction. This is because the Administration has continued to be guided by the desire to preserve the 28-year old Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty – a treaty signed with a country that no longer exists, in a Cold War strategic environment, and which was designed to perpetuate America's vulnerability to ballistic missile attack.

Last year, the Congress acted to end America's vulnerability by passing the National Missile Defense Act of 1999 with an overwhelmingly bipartisan majority. The President signed the Act into law on July 23, 1999. This law makes it the policy of the United States to deploy a national missile defense "as soon as is technologically possible." The committee looks to our distinguished witness this morning, Under Secretary of Defense Jacques Gansler, to tell us whether the Administration's plan for national missile defense is, in fact, technologically possible and, if so, whether we can expect the policy established by law to be implemented.

Following Secretary Gansler's testimony, the committee will hear from a separate panel of witnesses who will address the political and strategic dimensions of the Administration's NMD program. Those witnesses are:

- Ambassador Robert Joseph, Director of the Center for Counterproliferation Research at the National Defense University; and
- Dr. Stephen Cambone, Director of Research at NDU's Institute for National Strategic Studies.

Secretary Gansler, welcome, and thank you for taking time to appear before us today. I am looking forward to your testimony.

I would also like to note that Secretary Gansler is accompanied at the witness table this morning by General Ronald Kadish, Director of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, and retired General Larry Welch, the head of an independent review team tasked by the Secretary of Defense to assess the technical feasibility of the Administration's planned NMD architecture. That panel recently issued its report. Although not delivering prepared testimony, both General Kadish and General Welch will be available to answer any questions Members may have.

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